

# Student Dependency Status

## *Instructor Guide*

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### Objectives

- Describe what makes a student independent for federal student aid purposes.
- Review what happens on the FAFSA when a student does not have access to parental information.
- Explain which parent's information a dependent applicant should provide on the FAFSA.

### Materials

- PowerPoint Presentation
- Instructor's Guide
- Dependency Infographic
- "Who Is a Parent " Infographic

### Trainer Tips

This module consists of two sections: an informational lecture about the FAFSA dependency status questions, and a series of case studies that encourage participation. Some things to keep in mind:

- Despite the fact that the foster care, legal guardianship, emancipated minor, and homelessness questions have been on the FAFSA for a couple of years, some of your participants are probably unfamiliar with the questions. For that reason, it's important to highlight them and ensure participants understand them.
- The case studies in the section about whose information to report in the Parent sections of the FAFSA will be sure to generate additional examples from participants. Encourage them to answer each others' questions as these examples are raised.
- Throughout this document, we use the abbreviation "FAA" to mean "financial aid administrator."

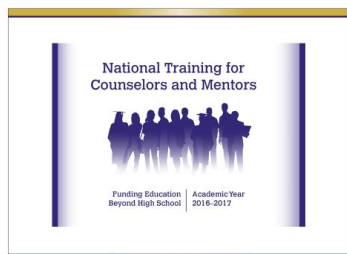
Read more about dependency status, special circumstances, who is a parent, and dependency overrides at the following places:

- *FAFSA on the Web* ([www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov))
- *Federal Student Aid Handbook: Application and Verification Guide*, Chapter 2, pp. 23-31 in 2016–17 edition (available at [www.ifap.ed.gov](http://www.ifap.ed.gov))
- The 2015-16 *Counselors and Mentors Handbook on Federal Student Aid*, pp. 28-29 and 35-36 ([www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov](http://www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov))
- What is the difference between a dependent student and an independent student? ([studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/filling-out/dependency](http://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/filling-out/dependency))
- "Am I Dependent or Independent" fact sheet ([studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/fafsa-dependency.pdf](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/fafsa-dependency.pdf))
  - "Who Is My 'Parent' When I Fill Out the FAFSA?" fact sheet ([studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/fafsa-parent.pdf](http://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/files/fafsa-parent.pdf))
- Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, Section 480(d)(7)
- Dear Colleague Letter GEN-08-12, pp. 79 to 80 ([www.ifap.ed.gov](http://www.ifap.ed.gov))

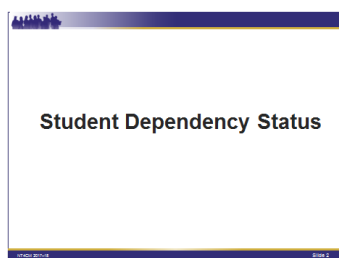
# PowerPoint Outline

## Slide Thumbnail

### Slide 1



### Slide 2



### Slide 3



## Content

### Student Dependency Status

- In this module, we'll talk about what makes a student dependent or independent for filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA.
- The federal student aid programs are based on the principle that paying for college is the family's responsibility. If a student is considered dependent on his or her parent(s), he or she must include parental information on the FAFSA so that the financial strength of the family can be determined.
- If a student is independent, only the student's information (and that of his or her spouse, if the student is married) is reported on the FAFSA.
- The independent status criteria are in the law; a student cannot "declare" himself or herself independent.
- The FAFSA asks several questions that determine dependency status. Let's go through them, and along the way I'll point out the criteria that are relatively new.
- We have provided a few infographics: Do I have to provide my parents information and

### What Makes a Student Independent?

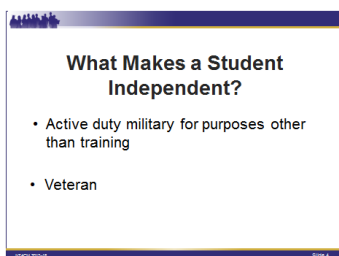
**Note to Instructor:** In the PowerPoint, we have shortened the questions for the sake of fitting them on the slides; the full questions are included in the "Am I Dependent or Independent?" fact sheet as well as below.

Dependency status questions:

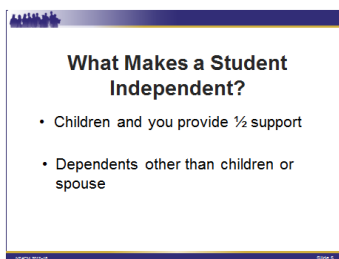
- Were you born before January 1, 1994?
- As of today, are you married?
- At the beginning of the 2017–2018 school year, will you be working

## Slide Thumbnail

### **Slide 4**



### **Slide 5**



### **Slide 6**



## Content

on a master's or doctorate program (such as an MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, EdD, graduate certificate, etc.)?

If you've been working with students on filling out FAFSAs for a while now, these questions will look very familiar.

### **What Makes a Student Independent?**

Dependency status questions:

- Are you currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for purposes other than training?
- Are you a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces?

### **What Makes a Student Independent?**

Dependency status questions:

- Do you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018?
- Do you have dependents (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half of their support from you, now and through June 30, 2018?

### **What Makes a Student Independent?**

Dependency status questions:

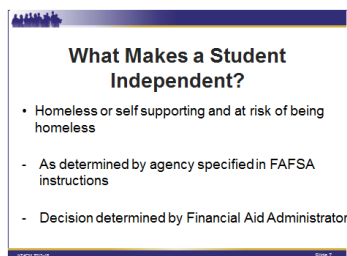
- At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?
- Are you or were you an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?
- Are you or were you in legal guardianship as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?

## Slide Thumbnail

### **Slide 6 continued**



### **Slide 7**



## Content

These questions are a combination of older and newer criteria.

- Foster care:
  - Applicant qualifies if he or she was in foster care at any time since turning 13.
- Emancipated minor and legal guardianship:
  - The court order must be in effect on the date the student signs the FAFSA, or must have been in effect immediately prior to the student becoming an adult.
  - "Adult" is defined by each state.
  - Court order must be issued in the student's state of legal residence.

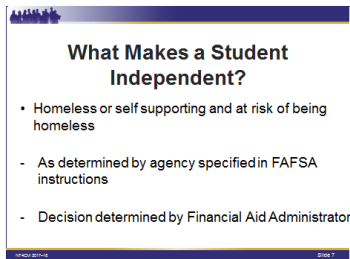
### **What Makes a Student Independent?**

Dependency status questions:

- At any time on or after July 1, 2016, did your high school or school district homeless liaison determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless?
- At any time on or after July 1, 2016, did the director of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless?
- At any time on or after July 1, 2016, did the director of a runaway or homeless youth basic center or transitional living program determine that you were an unaccompanied youth who was homeless or were self-supporting and at risk of being homeless?
- The FAFSA instructions contain definitions for the terms "homeless," "unaccompanied," and "youth." Applicants should read the instructions carefully if they think these criteria might apply to them.
- If a student does not have a determination from one of the officials specified in these questions, but believes he or she is an unaccompanied youth who is homeless or at risk of being homeless,

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**What Makes a Student Independent?**

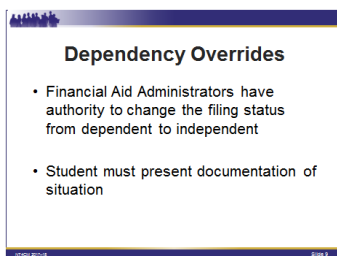
- Homeless or self supporting and at risk of being homeless
- As determined by agency specified in FAFSA instructions
- Decision determined by Financial Aid Administrator

### **Slide 8**



**Dependency Information—**  
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out/dependency>

### **Slide 9**



**Dependency Overrides**

- Financial Aid Administrators have authority to change the filing status from dependent to independent
- Student must present documentation of situation

## Content

the student should first contact his or her school liaison or the appropriate program director to see if a determination was made. If a determination was not made, the student should contact the financial aid office at the school he or she plans to attend.

### **StudentAid.Gov Website**

The Department of Education's official website StudentAid.gov, provides a dedicated webpage for determining dependency status. Below is the link to the webpage:

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out/dependency>

### **Independent vs Dependent**

- You can also use the following infographic to determine your dependency status

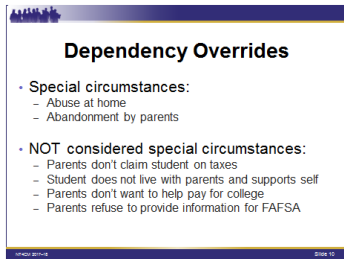
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/dependency-status.png>

### **Dependency Overrides**

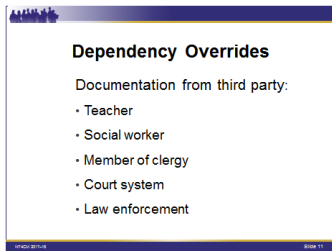
A Financial Aid Administrator (FAA) has the authority to make an otherwise dependent student independent if he or she believes the student's situation warrants an override. The student must show that he or she is in an unusual situation, referred to as "special circumstances." The FAA makes decisions on case-by-case basis with adequate documentation.

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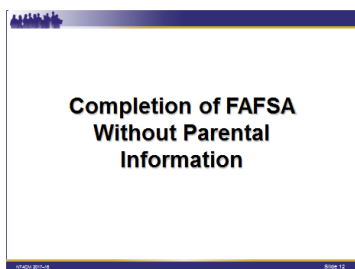
### **Slide 10**



### **Slide 11**



### **Slide 12**



## Content

### **Dependency Overrides**

Here are examples of special circumstances that might warrant a dependency override.

It's important to understand that a student can't just move out of the house and become independent. The U.S. Department of Education, or ED, has also stated that certain situations, by themselves or in combination, do not qualify a student for a dependency override.

### **Dependency Overrides**

#### **Documentation from a Third Party**

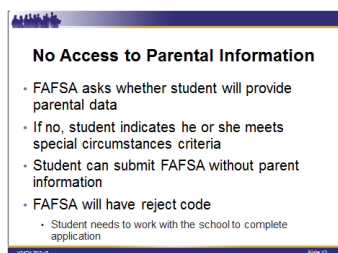
- FAA will ask student for documentation to support his or her claim of special circumstances. The documentation requested might take the form of a written statement from a third party who knows the situation.
- FAA's decision is final and cannot be appealed to ED.

### **Completion of FAFSA Without Parental Information**

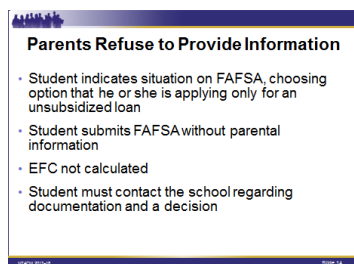
- Sometimes a dependent student is unable to provide his or her parents' information on the FAFSA, because the parents refuse to complete the application, or because the student is no longer in touch with his or her parents.
- Let's talk about some scenarios that might come up, and what the student should do.

## Slide Thumbnail

### **Slide 13**



### **Slide 14**



## Content

### **No Access to Parental Information**

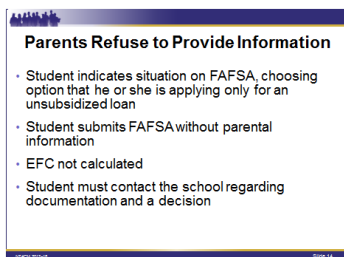
- FAFSA on the Web, or FOTW, allows the student to indicate whether he or she meets criteria such as having left home due to abuse.
- FOTW also allows certain homeless applicants to follow a similar process.
  - Those who are 22 or 23, and thus don't count as "homeless youth" but don't meet any criteria to be independent for FAFSA purposes.
- FAFSA is processed but no EFC is calculated.
- Student needs to contact the financial aid office.
  - Will request additional information regarding his or her situation in order to determine whether a dependency override is appropriate.

### **Parents Refuse to Complete FAFSA**

- Feature of FOTW:
  - Process is available for students who wish to apply for an unsubsidized Stafford Loan because parents are not supporting them and are refusing to complete the FAFSA.
- Appropriate for students:
  - Who do not qualify for a dependency override;
  - Whose parents have stopped providing financial support;
  - Whose parents will not support the student during college; and
  - Whose parents refuse to provide information on the FAFSA.
- Financial aid administrator at school may use professional judgment to award only an unsubsidized Stafford Loan.
- Documentation:
  - Parents need to submit a signed and dated statement stating that they have stopped supporting the student, will not support

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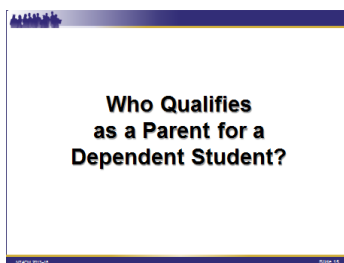
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**Parents Refuse to Provide Information**

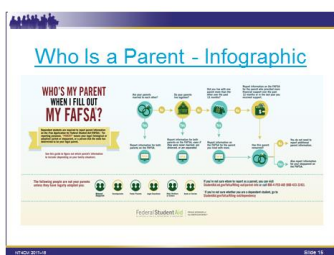
- Student indicates situation on FAFSA, choosing option that he or she is applying only for an unsubsidized loan
- Student submits FAFSA without parental information
- EFC not calculated
- Student must contact the school regarding documentation and a decision

### **Slide 15**



**Who Qualifies as a Parent for a Dependent Student?**

### **Slide 16**

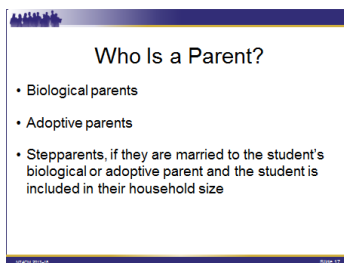


**Who Is a Parent - Infographic**

WHO'S MY PARENT WHEN I FILL OUT MY FAFSA?

The infographic provides a detailed breakdown of who qualifies as a parent for a dependent student, including biological parents, adoptive parents, and stepparents, and how they are determined for FAFSA purposes.

### **Slide 17**



**Who Is a Parent?**

- Biological parents
- Adoptive parents
- Stepparents, if they are married to the student's biological or adoptive parent and the student is included in their household size

## Content

the student in the future, and refuse to provide information for the FAFSA.

- If the parents refuse to provide the statement, the financial aid office must obtain documentation from a third party, such as a teacher, counselor, clergy, or court describing the student's relationship with his or her parents.
- It is not enough for the student to state that this is the situation; documentation must come from the parent or third party.

### **Who Qualifies as a Parent for a Dependent Student?**

Although a student may live with and receive support from any adult, only certain individuals count as a parent for FAFSA purposes.

### **Who is a Parent Infographic**

This infographic gives a detailed breakdown regarding which parent(s) are required to complete the FAFSA.

Go to: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/who-is-my-parent.png>

### **Who is a Parent?**

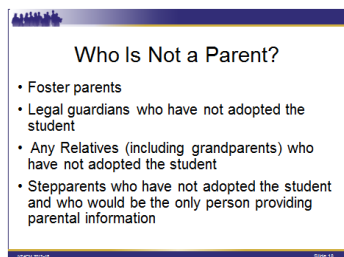
The following count as parents:

- Biological parents;
- Adoptive parents; and
- Stepparents, if they are married to the student's biological or adoptive parent and the student is included in their household size.

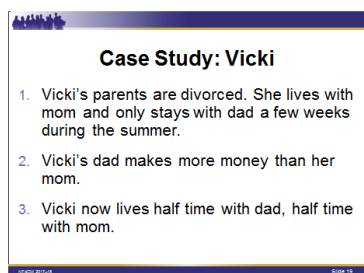


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### **Slide 18**



### **Slide 19**



## Content

The following individuals are not considered the student's parent for FAFSA purposes:

- Foster parents;
- Legal guardians who have not adopted the student;
- Relatives, such as grandparents, who have not adopted the student; and
- Stepparents who have not adopted the student and who would be the only person providing parental information.
- Older brothers or sisters

**Note to Instructor:** Refer trainees to "Dependency Infographic."

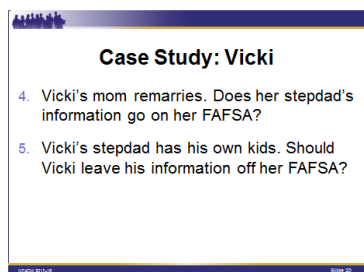
### Case Study: Vicki (Divorced Parents)

➔ Read the text of each numbered scenario, and then discuss the answer to that question before moving on to the next one.

1. (Q) Vicki's parents are divorced and she lives with her mom and only stays with her dad for a few weeks during the summer. Whose information is put into the parent sections of the FAFSA?  
(A) Mom's info – Vicki lives most of the time with Mom.
2. (Q) Vicki's dad makes quite a bit more money than her mom does – does that mean she should put his information on the FAFSA instead of her mom's?  
(A) No – because Vicki lives with Mom more than with Dad.
3. (Q) Vicki's custody situation changes; she now lives exactly half the year with her mom and half with her dad. Whose information goes on her FAFSA?  
(A) If you lived the same amount of time with each divorced or separated parent, the parent who provided more financial support during the past 12 months should complete the FAFSA.

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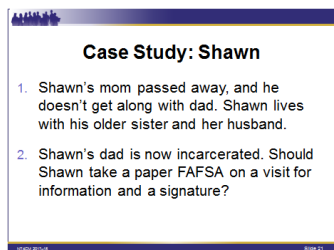
### **Slide 20**



**Case Study: Vicki**

4. Vicki's mom remarries. Does her stepdad's information go on her FAFSA?
5. Vicki's stepdad has his own kids. Should Vicki leave his information off her FAFSA?

### **Slide 21**



**Case Study: Shawn**

1. Shawn's mom passed away, and he doesn't get along with dad. Shawn lives with his older sister and her husband.
2. Shawn's dad is now incarcerated. Should Shawn take a paper FAFSA on a visit for information and a signature?

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### **Case Study: Vicki (Divorced Parents) (cont'd)**

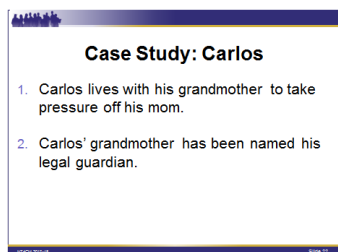
4. (Q) Vicki's mom remarries. Does Vicki include her stepfather's information on the FAFSA?  
(A) Yes – the FAFSA is a snapshot of the family's financial strength at the time the FAFSA is filed – not just the student's biological parent. Vicki's stepfather is part of the family, so Vicki must include his information on her application.
5. (Q) Vicki's stepfather has kids of his own to help through college, and he has told her he won't be able to help with her expenses. Does that mean Vicki should leave his information off her FAFSA?  
(A) No – but if the stepfather's children will live with him and Vicki's mom, they will be included in their household size, which will impact the amount of Vicki's financial need.

### **Case Study: Shawn (Other Parental Figures)**

- ➔ *As with Vicki's numbered scenarios, read a scenario, discuss it, and then move on to the next numbered item.*
1. (Q) Shawn's mom passed away several years ago, and he doesn't get along with his dad. So he moved out of his dad's house and lives across town with his older sister and her husband. Should Shawn list his sister's information on his FAFSA as parental data?  
(A) No; Shawn's sister is not his parent unless she adopts him.
  2. (Q) Shawn's dad is now incarcerated. Is his dad's information required on the FAFSA?  
(A) Shawn's dad is his parent, and therefore his information is required on the FAFSA unless Shawn's FAA performs a dependency override. Shawn can indicate on the FAFSA that he has a special circumstance, as we discussed earlier, and he will not be required to provide his dad's information in order to submit his initial application. However, the FAFSA will not be complete until Shawn's FAA determines whether to perform a dependency override. If the FAA performs an override, Shawn's FAFSA will be processed without his dad's information. If the FAA decides the override is not appropriate, Shawn will need to get his dad's information and signature.

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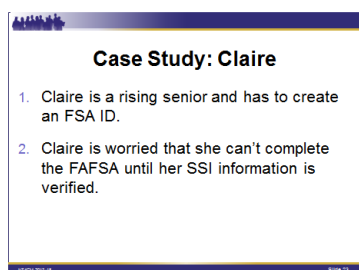
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**Case Study: Carlos**

1. Carlos lives with his grandmother to take pressure off his mom.
2. Carlos' grandmother has been named his legal guardian.

### **Slide 23**



**Case Study: Claire**

1. Claire is a rising senior and has to create an FSA ID.
2. Claire is worried that she can't complete the FAFSA until her SSI information is verified.

## Content

### **Case Study: Carlos (Other Parental Figures)**

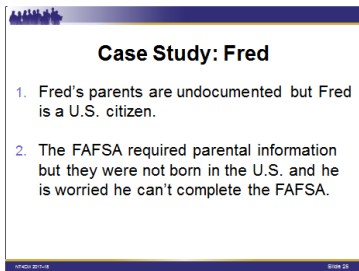
1. (Q) Carlos' mom is busy with his three younger siblings, so Carlos lives with his grandmother to take the pressure off his mom. Is Carlos' grandmother a parent for FAFSA purposes?  
(A) No; Carlos's grandmother is not his parent unless she has adopted him. If she hasn't, then Carlos needs to use his mom's information.
2. (Q) Carlos's grandmother has now been declared his legal guardian by a court in his state of legal residence. Should she provide her information on Carlos' FAFSA?  
(A) No; Because Carlos is in a legal guardianship as declared by a court in his state of residence, he is now independent and doesn't have to report either his grandmother's or his mother's information.

### **Case Study: Claire (FSA ID)**

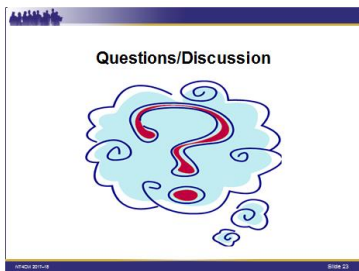
1. (Q) Claire is a rising senior and has to create an FSA ID. (A) You must create an FSA ID for both the student and the parent in order to complete the FAFSA. If you had a PIN create a new username and password and you can link your personal information to your new FSA ID.
2. (Q) Claire is worried that she can't complete the FAFSA until her Social Security information is verified. (A) You can create, sign and submit a new FAFSA immediately after you create an FSA ID. You do not have to wait for the SSI match to complete your FAFSA. If you want to make changes or corrections to your FAFSA, then you must wait 1-3 days for the SSI match but you can complete the actual FAFSA right away.

## Slide Thumbnail

### **Slide 24**



### **Slide 25**



## Content

### **Case Study: Fred (undocumented students)**

1. (Q) Fred's parents are undocumented but Fred is a U.S. citizen.  
(A) If Fred is a U.S. citizen then he is eligible for federal financial aid even if his parents are undocumented.
2. (Q) The FAFS requires parental information but his parents were not born in the U.S. and he is worried he can't complete the FAFSA.  
(A) Fred's parents can still fill out the FAFSA. The undocumented parents can fill out the FAFSA using 000-00-0000 in place of a SSN and provide the requested financial information whether or not they have filed taxes with the IRS. If your parents do not have Social Security numbers, you must print out the signature page from the online FAFSA so that your parents can sign it and send it in.
3. For more information on financial aid and undocumented students, go to: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/financial-aid-and-undocumented-students.pdf>

### **Wrap Up**

*Ask for any additional questions and wrap up the session.*

## Slide Thumbnail

## Content

### **Slide 26**



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